

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9529

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY KABUL

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LAHORE 0404

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM LAHORE ON POST- CONSTITUTION PRIORITIES

REF: KARACHI 0574; ISLAMABAD 2993; LAHORE 0399

BEGIN SUMMARY: PUNJABI DECISION MAKERS AND OTHERS ARE LOOKING BEYOND CONSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AT CONTINUING PROBLEMS TO BE FACED. GOVERNOR IS CONCERNED WITH PARTY REORGANIZATION, LAW AND ORDER, AND PRACTICAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS WATER SUPPLY . CHIEF MINISTER SEE' S PARTY' S MAIN TASK AS EDUCATING COUNTRY TO LIVE UNDER NEW CONSTITUTION. NUMBER OF INFLUENTIAL LAHORIS ARE EXCITED AT REPORTS NEW ELECTIONS, BUT ONE STRONG OPINION STAUNCHLY OPPOSES ISEA AS DIVISIVE, WASTEFUL AND UN-NECESSARY. INDIA/ BANGLADESH OFFER TO RETURN MOST POW' S APPEARS TO BE GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE IN LAHORE. END SUMMARY.

1. IN SEVERAL CONVERSATIONS WITH PPP FIGURES AND OTHERS IN AND OLD PUNJABI ELITES OVER PAST FEW DAYS, I HAVE HEARD NUMBER OF COMMENTS ON WHAT COMES NEXT NOW THAT CONSTITUTION MAKING IS COMPLETED. SOME ARE SEEN AS PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES, OTHERS REFLECT PUNJABI VIEWS ON NATIONAL SCENE.

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2. PARTY REORGANIZATION. GOVERNOR KHAR TOLD ME APRIL 16 THAT HE PLANS DEVOTE HIS ENERGIES TO PPP PARTY REORGANIZATION

AT ALL LEVELS THROUGHOUT PROVINCE. THIS IS AREA WHICH HAS BEEN NEGLECTED FOR TOO LONG. NEGLECT WAS UNFORTUNATELY NECESSARY BECAUSE PARTY LEADERSHIP WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH URGENT DAY- TO- DAY PROBLEMS FACING PROVINCE AND COUNTRY. NOW, HOWEVER, WITH NEW CONSTITUTION COMPLETED AND IN ANTICIPATION OF MANY CHANGES NEW CONSTITUTION WILL BRING ABOUT, PARTY REORGANIZATION CAN NO LONGER BE POSTPONED. WHEN I ASKED WHAT CHANGES HE HAD IN MIND, GOVERNOR MENTIONED CREATION OF NEW SENATE, POSSIBILITY OF COUNTRY- WIDE ELECTIONS, SHIFTS IN TOP GOVT ASSIGNMENTS (HE EXPECTS TO BECOME PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER AFTER NEW CONSTITUTION COMES INTO EFFECT). GOVERNOR IS PLANNING SERIES OF TOURS AROUND PUNJAB DURING WHICH HIS MAJOR ACTIVITY WILL BE PARTY REORGANIZATION.

3. LAW AND ORDER. KHAR ALSO VOICED CONCERN OVER LAW AND ORDER SITUATION IN PROVINCE AND EXPRESSED DETERMINATION " TO FACE IT HEAD ON". HE SAID IT WAS PAINFUL FOR HIM TO ADMIT THAT CRIME STATISTICS HAD WORSENERED OVER PAST TWO YEARS BUT HE THOUGHT THIS INEVITABLE SINCE PEOPLE WERE UNACCUSTOMED TO LIBERTY AND SOME ABUSED IT AS LICENSE. HE PROPOSES TO PROVIDE STRONGEST POSSIBLE SUPPORT TO POLICE AND TO PLACE STRONG PRESSURE ON COMMISSIONERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR LAW AND ORDER TO IMPROVE SITUATION .

4. WATER. GOVERNOR ALSO VERY CONCERNED ABOUT LONG- TERM WATER SITUATION IN PUNJAB. HE BELIEVES CURRENT WATER RESOURCES CAN BE STRETCHED LITTLE FURTHER THAN AT PRESENT AND IS TAKING PERSONAL INTEREST IN MEASURES SUCH AS EXPANSION OF NUMBERS OF TUBEWELLS, BOTH TO EXTEND IRRIGATED AREA AND, IMPORTANTLY, TO FLUSH AND RECLAIM AREAS WHERE SUB- SURFACE WATER HAS TURNED SALTY.

5. CONSTITUTION IMPLEMENTATION: CHIEF MINISTER MERAJ KHALID TOLD ME EARLY THIS WEEK THAT PPP NOW FACES BIGGEST TASK TO DATE IN EDUCATING PUBLIC TO WHAT NEW CONSTITUTION MEANS , AND TO FACT THAT COUNTRY HAS NOW ESTABLISHED LONG- TERM BASIS FOR GENUINE RULE OF LAW. HE BELIEVES NEW CONSTITUTION WILL WORK ADEQUATELY ONLY IF LEADERSHIP BRACESITSELF FOR SUSTAINED EFFORT TO EDUCATE PUBLIC TO RESPECT CONSTITUTION AND TO BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE PERSONAL GAIN FOR GREATER INTERESTS OF COUNTRY AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A WHOLE. KHALID SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY AND MOST OTHER PARTY LEADERS WILL DEVOTE CONSIDERABLE TIME TO THIS EDUCATIONAL EFFORT.

6. NEW ELECTIONS: IN TALKS WITH SEVERAL PPP MPA' S AND MNA' S THIS WEEK, AND WITH VARIETY OF OTHER PUNJABIS, I HAVE HEARD MUCH SPECULATION ON POSSIBILITY OF BHUTTO CALLING NEW ELECTIONS, NOW THAT CONSTITUTION- MAKING COMPLETED. MOST APPEARED TO FEEL IT WOULD BE CLEVER MOVE ON PRESIDENT' S PART; CONFIDENCE

WAS FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED THAT HE COULD BE COUNTED ON TO SPRING ELECTIONS ON COUNTRY AT TIME MOST ADVANTAGEOUS TO PPP AND MOST AWKWARD FOR OPPOSITION. STRONGLY DISSENTING OPINION, HOWEVER, WAS VOICED BY ARTICULATE WOMAN MPA (PPP) SYEDA ABIDA HUSSAIN FROM SARGHODA- JHANG WHO THOUGHT BHUTTO WOULD BE MAKING SERIOUS MISTAKE TO CALL ELECTIONS. HER ARGUMENTS WERE ESSENTIALLY SAME AS THOSE MENTIONED BY DAULTANA TO PRESIDENT (REPORTED BY CONGEN TIGER IN KARACHI 0574) BUT SHE LAID PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON DISRUPTIVE EFFECT OF ELECTIONS. SHE SAID CITIZENRY HERE WOULD DO MINIMUM OF WORK DURING CAMPAIGN AND FOLLOWING ELECTIONS. SHE ARGUED FORCEFULLY THAT RESULTING ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN WOULD BE FELT FOR OVER ENSUING YEAR. SHE THOUGHT POLITICAL PARTIES, INCLUDING PPP ITSELF, COULD CONTEST ELECTIONS ONLY BY PROMISING VOTERS EVEN MORE THAN PPP HAS ALREADY PROMISED. RESULT WOULD BE THOROUGH STIRRING UP OF ELECTORATE AT TIME WHEN COUNTRY CAN ILL AFFORD IT. COUNTRY HAS ACHIEVED STABILITY, SHE ARGUED, WITH EVEN LEADING OPPOSITION FIGURES HAVING ACCEPTED PPP RULE, AND IT WOULD BE FOOLISH TO WASTE THIS HARD- WON ASSET FOR SAKE OF NEW, ESSENTIALLY UNNECESSARY, ELECTORAL MANDATE.

7. POW' S. LAHORIS ARE GENERALLY PLEASED WITH NEWS OF INDIA/ BANGLADESH OFFER TO RELEASE MOST POW' S IN RETURN FOR PAK RELEASE OF BENGALIS. PRISONER RELEASE IS REGARDED HERE AS TOP PRIORITY FOR BHUTTO IN FIELD OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND VITAL PREREQUISITE FOR BANGLADESH RECOGNITION OR FURTHER PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION SIMLA ACCORD. REACTION IS NOT ONE OF UNMIXED ENTHUSIASM, HOWEVER. MANY CONSIDER IT A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW TO HAVE ANY RPT ANY POW' S BROUGHT TO TRIAL BY BENGALIS. OLD BIASES ARE STILL VERY NEAR SURFACE. NEVERTHELESS, OUR QUICK READING OF LOCAL MOOD IS THAT LAHORIS WOULD GO ALONG WITH BHUTTO ACCEPTANCE OF POW RELEASE OFFER.

8. COMMENT. INFLUENTIAL ELEMENTS HERE ARE BEGINNING TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LOOK BEYOND EUPHORIA OF CONSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AT PROBLEMS THAT REMAIN.
KING

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